My Life Closed Twice Before Its Close Study Guide

My Life Closed Twice Before Its Close by Emily Dickinson

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Introduction

"My Life Closed Twice Before Its Close" was first published in Dickinson's posthumous third collection, *Poems by Emily Dickinson, third series,* in 1896. Scholars do not know when it was written. The poem has also been published in some other anthologies under the name "Parting." Like much of Dickinson's best work, this poem is simultaneously personal and universal. On a personal level, the poem's speaker is telling of the losses he or she has suffered, so painful that they were like death itself. Though the speaker has not yet experienced real, physical death, he or she cannot bear to imagine anything that could be more terrible than the two deprivations already experienced. The speaker does not tell us what these losses were, but one might imagine some bereavement□the death of a loved one, the end of a passionate affair.

On a universal level, the poem poignantly describes the great tragedy of human life, for to be human is to suffer loss. In the final two lines of the poem, Dickinson creates a brilliant paradox, a statement that seems contradictory but might really be expressing a truth. Here heaven and hell, great symbolic opposites according to conventional wisdom, come together in their relationships to the word "parting." If there is a heaven, all we know of it is that we must leave behind our loves and lives on this earth in order to enter there. At the same time, all human beings, to some degree, have known the misery of the private hell of separation and loss because that is an unavoidable part of human experience.

Author Biography

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson was born on December 10, 1830, in Amherst, Massachusetts, the second of three children to respectable, upper-middle-class Puritan parents. She would later describe her father as domineering and her mother as emotionally distant. Early on, she was a great admirer of and a great rival to her brother, Austin, born nearly two years previously. She was active, precocious, and strong-willed as a child. But in time, she would become increasingly sensitive, shy, and retiring.

After two years atAmherst Academy, Dickinson entered the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary (now MountHolyoke College), where she studied for one year until homesickness drove her home. Although only seventeen at the time, Dickinson quietly defied both official and peer pressure to experience a conversion to Christianity. Dickinson later admitted in a letter that she secretly worried that somehow she had willfully put herself beyond God's grace by her rebellion.

Despite the brevity of her formal education, Dickinson voraciously read all of her father's books and subscribed to the great literary journals of her time. In fact, her straggle with social Christendom may have actually propelled her into a quest for the sublime in literature. (This Romantic transference from orthodox Christianity to a worship of nature and the powers of the imagination has been described by M. H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp.)* By the late 1850s, Dickinson had begun to take herself seriously as a poet, inspired by the successes of George Eliot, George Sand, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the great women writers of her time.

Many speculate that a tragic end to a love affair caused Dickinson's prodigious poetic output in the early 1860s. The story goes that Dickinson's heart was broken when clergyman Charles Wadsworth told her, in 1860, that he was journeying to California. There are, in fact, many poems from this period that accurately describe the processes of a severe mental breakdown. Nevertheless, all such speculations are just that□speculations. What is more interesting is that Dickinson so successfully portrayed various life experiences and mental states considering that, by the early 1860s, she had chosen to live in almost total physical isolation from the outside world.

In 1862, Dickinson sent Thomas Higginson, editor of *The Atlantic Monthly,* a letter and included some of her poems. She internalized his observation that she was not ready for publication in a way he never would have suspected. She resolved to continue writing in her own unique style and await future readers that would appreciate her voice, while still sending Higginson poetry for advice she never followed. She lived out the remainder of her life in relative obscurity, caring for her invalid mother until her death in 1882. Emily Dickinson's own death□from a kidney ailment called Bright's Disease□followed nearly four years later, in 1886.

Poem Text

My life closed twice before its close

It yet remains to see

If Immortality unveil

A third event to me

So huge, so hopeless to conceive

As these that twice befell.

Parting is all we know of heaven.

And all we need of hell.

Plot Summary

Line 1:

The poem begins with a powerful statement: The speaker's life has already "closed" two times. Here, the use of the verb "closed" might be interpreted in two ways. One meaning might be "finished or concluded," but another could be "closed on all sides; shut in." Either or both meanings seem appropriate, inasmuch as Dickinson's poetry is often concerned with both the theme of death and the theme of isolation. "Before its close" most likely means "before its conclusion," or before that final closing act of every life□the concrete, physical death of the body.

Lines 2-4:

In these lines, the speaker expresses concern about what the future might hold. The poem's speaker, having already suffered two life "closes," is left to deal with whatever will happen next. "Immortality" is the only capitalized word in the poem which does not fall at the beginning of a line. One might have expected her to use the word "Mortality," as that is the way that most people talk about the end of life, but the use of "Immortality" shows the spiritual depth of the poem's speaker. "Immortality," or endless life, is a sacred mystery that may or may not "unveil," or reveal, a third and final "close" to the speaker. There is a certain tone of courage in these lines, perhaps the courage that enables people to go on living in spite of overwhelming losses.

Lines 5-6:

In these lines, the speaker wonders if the next "event," if it ever occurs, could possibly be as "huge" and as "hopeless to conceive" as the two "events" or "closes," that have already happened. Here, "huge" is probably used in the sense of one of its synonyms, "tremendous," meaning capable of making one tremble. "Hopeless to conceive" indicates impossible to imagine. In other words, the speaker knows that there is no way to prepare for the next, perhaps inevitable, "close." In addition, the speaker cannot imagine that anything, even death, could be more unbearable than what has already happened. Though most people know that grief and loss are an unavoidable part of the human experience, there is no way to really prepare for it before it happens.

Lines 7-8:

The word "parting" is a clue to the meaning of "closed" and "close" in the first quatrain of the poem. Like most of the words Dickinson uses, "parting" is rich with meanings. On one level, it means departure or leave-taking. In this sense, when the speaker's life "closed," it might have been because of some terrible separation from a loved one□relative, lover, or friend. On another level, "parting" is used as a euphemism for the

act or time of dying. In this sense, the mysterious, unavoidable "close" which the speaker awaits is the permanent separation that occurs at the end of life. "Heaven" and "hell," traditionally characterized as extreme opposites, meet each other on earth in the context. When a loved one is lost to death, people comfort themselves with a faith that the deceased is "in heaven;" however, no one *knows* this to be true. All that is concrete and tangible about the afterlife is the separation of the living and the dead. On the other hand, though there are many interpretations of what "hell" is in various religions, it is universally understood that hell is somehow the absence, or separation from, God and love. On earth, the word "hell" is used to describe anything that causes great torment and anguish, such as the loss of love.

Themes

Permanence

With its use of the word "Immortality," this poem presents a contrast that seems simple at first but more complex as it is examined more closely. The poem deals with the fact that life ends□one of the few things that is certain about life. The speaker of the poem says that her life has been cut short twice, and that she expects it to happen at least once more at life's end. The ironic thing is that life will eventually be limited by the soul's limitlessness□its immortality. The word "Immortality" is used in the poem, for the most part, in the same way that it is used in common discourse. There is a key difference, however. Dickinson capitalizes it, and relates it to God and heaven. In Christian doctrine, heaven is where those who have died in this world will go to join God and to live eternally. To reach this state of permanence in heaven requires going through the troubles associated with life's uncertainty. However, as the poem points out, life is so unstable that it can close more than once□three or more times□without reaching any state of stability. It is life's frustrating tendency to go on and on after reaching its end that makes the permanence of the afterlife "hopeless to conceive" for the speaker of this poem.

Alienation and Loneliness

Whether one interprets the phrase "my life closed twice" as death, as traumatic events, or as revelations, it seems to indicate that the speaker of the poem feels separated from all that came before. The word "closed" appears final, absolute, leaving no possibility of going back. The implication is that everything the speaker knew prior to each "closure" is left irreversibly behind; inaccessible to the person she grew to be each time. Old ideas, former relationships, and familiar ways of doing things are all sealed off in the past, as if locked behind a closed door. Each time that the speaker's life closed, she had been left alienated from what had gone before. Furthermore, the speaker of the poem is tortured by the loneliness she has suffered each time her life closed. The line "Parting is.... all we need of hell" expresses the pain of hell in present life caused by parting and closing.

Death

Although death is often presented as an end and what comes after death is seen as mysterious, Dickinson presents the end of life as the beginning of Immortality. In comparison with the eternal afterlife suggested in the poem, life itself seems puny. The poem does not celebrate life, but does not accept death with open arms either. Rather, death is presented as having terrible consequences. It separates one from the things one loves in this world. Although "Parting" (the word used to indicate death) suggests a non-violent end to life, it is an ending that creates the agonies of hell.

Style

" My Life Closed Twice Before Its Close" is written in two quatrains, or stanzas of four lines each, arranged in iambs. The iamb is a metric foot of two syllables in which the first syllable is unstressed and the second stressed. It is the basis for the most common line pattern in English verse.

The first and third lines of each quatrain are in iambic tetrameter, which means that there are four jambs in each line ("tetra" meaning four). In the alternate, and rhyming, lines, Dickinson changes to a three-foot meter called iambic trimeter ("tri" meaning three). For a lesser poet, such a fixed metrical pattern might have been a creative limitation. However, Dickinson, whose genius was her ability to choose the perfect word above all others, used the simplicity of this familiar stanza pattern to showcase the power of language without distraction.

One interesting aspect of this poem is Dickinson's use of traditional punctuation. In many of her poems, Dickinson substitutes dashes for periods, commas and other punctuation marks. However, this poem consists of two complete sentences, one long and the other short, punctuated with a semicolon, two commas and two periods.

Historical Context

Critics and historians frequently draw a connection between Emily Dickinson's poetry and the New England Transcendentalist movement. Dickinson was growing up and formulating her own ideas when the Transcendentalist movement was reaching its peak between the 1830s and the 1860s. Dickinson lived in Amherst, only seventy-five miles away from the center of Transcendentalism in Boston. Furthermore, Dickinson openly discussed the influence of Transcendentalism, especially the influence of the ideas in the essay called "The Poet" by Ralph Waldo Emerson, a key figure in the movement. However, literary critics point out that, although Dickinson's poetry reflects aspects of Transcendentalism it also reflects many of the Puritan religious beliefs that Transcendentalism supposedly contradicted and replaced. Some interpret this duality as a sign that Dickinson, in her devotion to her family's religious heritage, allowed herself to be trapped in the contradiction of embracing both modern thinking and a putatively antiquated way of thinking.

The Puritans were a religious sect emerging as a splinter faction of English Protestantism during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Protestantism itself began as a protest against the Catholic Church because of its emphasis on ceremony and on the powers of the church hierarchy, with too little attention being given to God. Puritans felt that mainstream Protestants were themselves distracted by the things of the world. Turning their backs on political activity and social interaction, Puritans focused on theories of heaven and hell and who would end up spending eternity in each when their lives were over. Hard work was valued by Puritans as a way of striving toward one's salvation, and worshipping God was a constant element of everything they did. The Puritans came to power in England under Oliver Cromwell, but eventually lost power in a resurgence of royalist forces. As a result the Church of England regained control. At that time, North America was being colonized, and hundreds of Puritans made the decision to move to the New World, where they could practice their religious beliefs freely. The Puritans founded Jamestown, the first permanent settlement in North America, and the majority of those who came to America on the Mayflower were Puritans. In 1620, off the shores ofProvincetown Harbor in what came to be Massachusetts, the Mayflower Compact was signed, representing the first form of European-style government in America and influencing the country's political development. Because Puritans valued hard work and disdained comfort or pleasure, they were able to survive the wilderness conditions that other Europeans could not tolerate. American capitalism has been influence by Puritan ethics, particularly in the economic principle that wealth is the reward of hard work and that poverty and suffering are the deserved rewards for failing to work hard. In Massachusetts, among the descendants of the original Puritans, the Puritan influence would have been especially keenly felt.

In some ways, Transcendentalism was a response to Puritan beliefs, although it was also influenced by the literary trend of Romanticism that was sweeping European literature at the same time. Romanticism had grown throughout the late 1700's, as seen most clearly in the works of the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the

German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The ideas of Romanticism were crystallized into a distinct statement of beliefs in the introduction to William Wordsworth's and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. Romanticism emphasized freedom and nature, presenting human beings as innate geniuses in their capacity to understand the natural world and dismissing society as a form of corruption. In America, the Romantic ideal made its strongest impact in the way it influenced the New England Transcendentalists. This was a movement begun in 1836 with the Transcendental Club in Boston. Members included such noteworthy intellectuals as Bronson Alcott, William Ellery Charming, Margaret Fuller and Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau's book *Walden,* about the years he spent living in a shack in the woods relying on nature and limiting his involvement with people, is still read in schools today. The most direct and influential spokesperson for Transcendentalist beliefs was Ralph Waldo Emerson, a poet and the author of such essays as "Serf-Reliance" and "Nature." The Transcendentalists were like the Puritans in the way that they emphasized the individual's relationship to God without the need for a priest or other religious figure to be involved in the middle. However, they did not picture God as a stern, vengeful father figure. Instead of using the word "God," Emerson coined the word "Over-Soul," implying that this was an entity present in all of nature and that all people and all components of nature were part of this cosmic force equally.

With its emphasis on Nature as something to be approached and experienced, the Transcendentalist movement faced considerable difficulties in nineteenth century America. As the Industrial Revolution developed, Americans became too busy and too excited with production and economic growth to give much attention to the Transcendentalist worship of nature. As the Civil War approached, citizens chose up political sides, and the transcendental goal of individuality and self-reliance was seen as naive and self-indulgent. By the time that Emily Dickinson wrote most of her poems and the Civil War was approaching, the influence of the Transcendentalist movement was declining. Both Puritanism and Transcendentalism can be seen as influences on Dickinson's thought, and her poems show a unique mind that was able to use and blend important ideas from several sources.

Critical Overview

" My Life Closed Twice Before Its Close" has been viewed by many critics as a poem about the act, by God or man, of revealing something surprising and not known before. The critic Martha Hale Shack-ford, writing in the *Atlantic Monthly,* sees the poem's speaker as a "voice of tragic revelation." Shackford explains that Dickinson was not so much a philosopher as she was an observer of life, gifted with the ability to express profound emotions.

Another critic, Conrad Aiken, offers an interesting interpretation of the poem in his book *Collected Criticism.* He points out Dickinson's obsession with death, noting it as a persistent theme in her poetry. He writes, "she seems to have thought of it constantly□she died all her life, she probed death daily." Aiken goes on to explain how the theme of death is present in some of her "sharpest" work, noting that her poems tend to be more lyrical, or musical, when they deal with the subject of death and the question of immortality.

A third critic, Kenneth Stocks, writing *in Dickinson and the Modern Consciousness,* **views the** poem from a very intriguing angle, calling it "one of the greatest love-poems ever written." According to Stocks, "love, death, heaven and hell" come together in the poem, and the result is a deep and powerful insight into a universal human experience.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Jeannine Johnson currently teaches writing and literature atHarvard University. She has also taught at Yale, from which she received her Ph.D., and atWake Forest University. Her most recent essay is on Adrienne Rich's "To a Poet, " published in the **Explicator.** *In the following essay, Johnson discusses Dickinson's vision of isolation in "My Life Closed Twice before Its Close."*

"A letter always feels to me like Immortality because it is the mind alone without corporeal friend" *{The Letters of Emily Dickinson).* When Emily Dickinson wrote these lines to the author and editor Thomas Wentworth Higginson, she might as well have been describing the nature of her poetry. Dickinson reveals that a letter provides her a link with "immortality," which in this context does not mean life after death but a sense of infinitude in this life. The "friend" to whom she writes is not physically present and thus, though she imagines another person who will eventually read her thoughts, her own experience in writing is one of solitude. Dickinson describes poetry writing in much the same terms. In "My Life Closed Twice before Its Close□" (Poem 1732), the poet also refers to "Immortality" and the way that her encounter with it may expand her mind. In the letter quoted above and in other poems, such as "The Brain□is wider than the Sky□" (Poem632), Dickinson extols the virtues of pursuing her intellectual goals in isolation and of driving her mind beyond the rational. However, in "My life closed twice," the poet does not celebrate this confrontation with the incomprehensible, and her solitude here is accompanied by a marked sadness.

The poet's mind is alone and she is mourning the fact that her life has already "closed twice," or in other words that the poet herself has symbolically died two times before her bodily death. This poem recalls an earlier work, "I never lost as much but twice" (Poem 49), likely written in 1858. The loss in "I never lost as much" is the literal death of two persons close to the poet, as these privations are likened to bodies that lie buried "in the sod." However, in "My life closed twice," the cause of the poet's anguish is not so clear: while it is certain that these two "closings" were very painful, the poet declines to identify them explicitly. The poet anticipates but does not quite experience a third and final wound: "It yet remains to see / If Immortality unveil / A third event to me." The incidents to which she refers are "So huge, so hopeless," that the poet's imagination fails her when she tries to utter how much worse a third similar "event" might be.

Based on the subjects of other Dickinson poems, we could imagine that the afflictions in "My life closed twice" were emotional losses, spiritual injuries, or even artistic disappointments. But, since the poet mentions "parting" in the final stanza, she hints that the two events were instances in which she was separated□by death or by the dissolution of a relationship□from another person. Critics have routinely claimed that the two closings in this poem likely refer to the real death of Dickinson's father in 1874 and to the figurative death, around 1861, of her romantic interest in Charles Wadsworth, a Philadelphia clergyman. However, there are too many risks and not enough rewards in making such speculations. There is no firm evidence as to the date of the poem, so we cannot limit with any certainty the time period during which the events referred to in the

poem might have occurred. Furthermore, Dickinson suffered more than two major "closings" in her life: we could just as easily□and as plausibly□claim that the painful incidents to which the poet alludes are those of the death of her mother (in 1882) and of Susan Huntington Gilbert's marriage to Emily's Dickinson's brother, Austin (in 1856).

Emily and Susan shared a lifelong romantic passion for one another, as letters and other evidence reveal, and Emily was devastated by Susan's marriage. Though afterward they renewed their emotional bonds and, for most of thirty years, lived next door to each other, Emily was forever changed by her friend's marriage. In a letter from the mid-1850s, Emily wrote to Susan, "You need not fear to leave me lest I should be alone, for I often part with things I fancy I have loved, □ sometimes to the grave, and sometimes to an oblivion rather bitterer than death□thus my heart bleeds so frequently that I shant mind the hemorrhage, and I only add an agony to several previous ones ..." *{Open Me Carefully).* Here Dickinson makes it clear that her personal sufferings have been many and that they are not confined to the two most often cited by critics. In addition, in this letter Dickinson confirms that the loss of a relationship can cause as much anguish as the death of a loved one.

In the end, it makes little difference whether we can accurately identify the two milestones mentioned in the poem, for to claim a strict parallel between Dickinson's life and her work reduces the value of her poems to biographical history. In fact, Dickinson herself discouraged such biographical readings of her poems when she offered this warning to Thomas Higginson: "When I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse□it does not mean□me□but a supposed person" *(The Letters of Emily Dickinson).* From very early in her career, Dickinson was conscious of creating a poetic persona in her writing, and though the experiences in her poems are genuinely human, the speaker who relates these experiences is a fictional character.

Although there seems to be a personal motive behind "My life closed twice," its primary goal is to reveal larger truths about the human condition. The final lines contain an aphorism, or succinct statement of a general principle: "Parting is all we know of heaven / And all we need of hell." This aphoristic quality is characteristic of Dickinson's poetry, but the simplicity of her language can be misleading, and the meaning behind this couplet is complex. In two lines, the poet encapsulates the pain of being kept apart from someone she loves. The lines echo Juliet's observation, in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet,* that "Parting is such sweet sorrow." This allusion to a play about a romantic relationship reinforces Dickinson's idea that the separation caused by physical death is no worse than the separation of lovers.

Yet Dickinson's statement does not contain the hopefulness of Juliet's protest. Parting is sorrowful for Juliet, but it is also sweet because she looks forward to a future reunion with Romeo. In Dickinson's formula, "sorrow" is represented by "hell," but, unlike Shakespeare's heroine, Dickinson finds little relief in the sweetness that should be delivered by "heaven." The only benefit in experiencing the parting that Dickinson depicts is that our knowledge of heaven may be slightly increased. That is to say, when someone dies we might console ourselves with the idea that that person has gone to a better world, and in that moment we might contemplate what heaven is like and imagine

that we have come to better understand it. However, the poet did not subscribe to conventional religious beliefs of her day, and she would not have placed much value on learning about the hereafter, especially at the high cost of a loved one's death.

Juliet's observation ends on a positive note, and, though she is ignorant of the tragedy that is to befall her, she looks forward to the future, as the second part of the couplet reveals: "Parting is such sweet sorrow, / That I shall say good night till it be morrow." However, Dickinson's poem ends with the word "hell," and its woe resounds without interruption or expectation. Dickinson's ironic revision of Shakespeare suggests that the verbal devices we employ as consolation are inadequate to their task, and it further indicates that there is little redemptive value in undergoing enormous emotional distress.

The poet in "My life closed twice" seems to be left alone with her incomprehensible sadness, but the structure of the poem tries to counteract her solitude. The piece is composed of two four-line stanzas, or quatrains, that follow an ABCB rhyme scheme. (These are the ballad stanzas typical of Dickinson's poetry.) But even though the poem is split into two groups of four lines, the meaning of the poem is divided between the first six lines and the last two lines: the first six constitute one full sentence and the last two constitute another. The final couplet is distinguished from the rest of the poem, yet these two parts are still linked by the stanzaic structure. In the couplet, the poet changes the first person singular ("I") to the first person plural ("we"), a gesture that marks her as a member of a community rather than an isolated individual. Though a period separates the poet from her identification with others, this is not as absolute a division as a stanza break would be. Nevertheless, the community toward which she signals is absent, just like the "corporeal friend" to whom one writes a letter. Dickinson's rather solemn work suggests that though a poem, like a letter, confirms both the existence of its addressee and the poet's separation from that person, there is some solace in reaching out to others by writing to them, if only to temporarily stanch the "hemorrhage" of a lifetime of partings.

Source: Jeannine Johnson, in an essay for *Poetry for Students,* Gale Group, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

David Kelly teaches literature and creative writing at several community colleges in Illinois. In the following essay, Kelly argues that it is usually unfair to invade an author's privacy by using her life to interpret her poetry, but that it might be acceptable or even necessary in the case of Emily Dickinson.

In the poem "My Life Closed Twice before Its Close," Emily Dickinson raises the particularly daring question of whether anything that happens after death will, or could, outdo the startling events of her life, in terms of hugeness and inconceivability. In a way, she is playing the role of the humble, timid questioner, adopting the passive pose of one who is just wondering about things, not speculating about what *will* happen but curious about what might. However, as in all of Dickinson's poetry, this demure casing serves to cushion a steely temperament. The allure of her poetry has always been that she reaches the same conclusions as organized religions but that she skips past the easy answers and addresses the more troubling uncertainties. It is in part the nature of organized religion that some people might possibly fool themselves and others by mouthing the right words without understanding the deeper implications. In the case of this poem, Dickinson skips past the intellectual ease of praising heaven and rejecting hell: anyone knows well enough to do that. She even goes past the uncomfortable question of whether the afterlife will be a good experience or not. Even worse than Eternity being bad would be if it were irrelevant: the very unsettling question this poem asks is whether heaven or hell will be as potent or as startling as our experiences here on Earth. The Afterlife less interesting than life? You might know someone who has made such a bold claim so eloquently, but probably not.

Each year, millions of words are published about Emily Dickinson and her poetry, and easily ten times more appears as unpublished works, such as school assignments and chat-room banter. Most of what people write concerns her life. She did indeed have a fascinating life. She was an archetype: there is something of the recluse in every poet, and something of the poet in every recluse. People hearing for the first time about the woman who shuttered herself away from the world and scribbled off hundred of poems, with no concern for publication, have the sense that they have heard this story before. The themes in her poems interconnect and contradict in a bewildering pattern. Readers feel that they need to look beyond the poetry for clues, and that the poet therefore deserves to have her mysterious life picked apart, in payment for the trouble that she has caused everyone by leaving her ideas poorly explained. If Dickinson had published during her lifetime, her fans could have written to her and gotten her own responses to the questions that plague us all today; if she had socialized more, maybe someone would have kept a record of what their friend Emily thought, the way Boswell did for Johnson; if she had earned a living, it would probably have been as a scholar, and we would have the benefit of her analyses of other works to help us analyze her own. As it is, we make do with what we have, plugging the gaps in the ideas the poetry insinuates with details plucked from her life.

In general, it should be considered unfair to reach into an author's private life in order to get a better view of their works. There is, after all, a reason that writers use poems and autobiographies to set down their ideas. I think it is safe to assume that a similar lack of exhibitionism compels an author like Dickinson to lock herself away in her house. Neither writing nor solitude can be construed to mean the author welcomes the scrutiny of the world. Shouldn't we respect the desires of authors that we like? Too often, though, we don't. Maybe, as already noted, we feel that any debt to the writer's wish is overruled if he or she makes the poetry too challenging, or maybe we feel that there are writers who are just so completely fascinating that we become irrationally ravenous for any minute detail about them, whether it concerns their life, work, discarded drafts, distant relatives or whatnot. Still, it seems only respectful to leave the life of the author, especially one who valued her privacy, like Dickinson, out of the conversation when we can.

When we can. But what can we do about a case like "My Life Closed Twice before Its Close"? Emily Dickinson does, after all, tease readers' curiosity by referring to a mystery in her past□two of them, actually. In daily life, if someone tells me something enigmatic, such as the fact that her life closed twice, I consider it an opening to conversation. Even if I were not interested in what she is hinting at, politeness requires me to show some interest in the open-ended tow line that has been thrown out. Maybe the issue shifts away from respect for privacy once the author has invited us in. Assuming this freedom has led scholars to amass mountains of information about Dickinson's relatives and acquaintances, hot on the trail of what it is that she *means.* I myself am not entirely comfortable with this assumption, but I can see why others believe in it. I would rather try understanding the poem on its own merits, without having to consider the author along with it. I think we can glance toward Dickinson's personal story, nod, and then understand her poem without any biography.

It is not at all far-fetched to say that it was the poet herself, a coy recluse, who began this line of inquiry. Emily Dickinson was a very smart person. I would venture to guess that, intensely aware as she was about all other things in her life, she knew how the obscurity of her words would raise interest in her beyond the page. The same faith in her genius makes me just as sure that she was not limited to herself when she wrote "me" and "my": a forceful imagination like hers could not be corralled into just one person's lifetime. The situation in "My Life Closed Twice before Its Close" probably is not imaginary□there are enough traumatic events in Dickinson's life for us to accept that at least two qualify as "closings." Isn't it is enough for readers, though, to realize that she *could have* imagined them? The impact of this poem would be the same no matter what her sources of inspiration were. We do not need to know whether it refers to a broken love affair, a friend's death, a nervous breakdown or a relative's disability, or if she felt her life closed because of some smaller, unrecorded personal loss, something that went deeper into her soul than we could ever understand. Maybe one particular look in the mirror one particular day did it. Maybe someone left her cake out in the rain. I doubt the significance of the answer almost as much as I doubt the possibility of finding what it is.

Reading poetry would not, after all, be much of an experience if we had to count on a one-to-one correlation between the events depicted in the poem and some definite

external reality. If too much of the poem's impact depended on its relationship to reality, then it would mean a lot more to the author who lived it, but the reader's experience would be much less potent. This idea becomes clearest in a case like "My Life Closed Twice before Its Close": if we could not all place our life's closings into the first few lines□if we believed that it was about only *her* life and the events surrounding it□then there wouldn't really be any reason why anyone but Dickinson herself should care. But we *do* care, because, as with all great works of art, the situation stirs our sense of empathy. We all feel we have been in the situation she is writing from. There is a good reason why Dickinson was so mysterious about the personal, biographical source of the poem: it piques readers' curiosity, drawing us in. There is also a good reason to not think too hard about the author's real life beyond what is presented on the page, for that tends to distance the reader, freezing the poem as an inanimate object. It becomes Emily Dickinson's problem, not one's own.

Emily Dickinson lived in a world created by her own mind, in a universe that followed the exact same rules of physics and emotions as ours. We have learned a lot from her world, but for some reason we keep trying to drag her into this one. We find lovers for her, we try to recreate incidents that may have been the "reality" behind the incidents she talks about in her poetry. I doubt that this is what she would have wanted, and I don't think that she owes it to us. In a way, playing with her life after she is gone is a little like picking up her hollowed-out skull and using it as a puppet to tell jokes. It is awfully disrespectful, and it is unnecessary. Her poems stand well enough on their own: in fact, they have even more to offer if they are appreciated for their own wisdom and are not taken as signposts to points in her biography. It can hardly matter what closed her heart twice in life. If readers cannot figure those enigmatic words out by looking within themselves, there is nothing in Dickinson's life that will help.

Source: David Kelly, in an essay for *Poetry for Students,* Gale Group, 2000.

Critical Essay #3

Aviya Kushner, the poetry editor for Neworld Renaissance Magazine, *earned an M.A. in creative writing fromBoston University. In the following essay, Kushner elaborates on the quality of mystery found in the poem.*

Many details of Emily Dickinson's life remain a mystery, from what she looked like as an adult to the nature of her love life. Similarly, mystery is a major part of her immensely accomplished, spare, and often easy-to-memorize poetry. Riddles, secrets, and lines which can be read in at least three ways abound. What's more, Dickinson's distinctive poetry is filled with dashes which hang, leaving the breathless and sometimes baffled reader to fill in the mysterious black blanks.

"My Life Closed Twice Before Its Close" is a typical Dickinson mystery□a tight package waiting to be unraveled. Clearly, as every child learns, a person dies only once. But as a quick thumbing through her copious collected works reveals, Dickinson was fascinated by death and subjects related to it. She was especially gripped by the idea of the soul and the afterlife. Interestingly, this preoccupation with immortality and the next world leaked into her view of words and language. In fact, Dickinson seemed to believe in the power of words to expand on life, to make life more colorful and larger than it really was. One of her shortest poems articulates this belief in the strength and inherent life force of the spoken and written word:

A word is dead When it is said, Some say. I say it just Begins to live That day.

Life, for Dickinson, begins on the page. Her standard biography of a shut-in who never had a romantic relationship may strengthen this view, but what's most amazing is the way Dickinson straddles between an absolutely strong written voice and a plot with huge holes in it. That short poem is also noteworthy because it is composed entirely of one-syllable words, except for "begins." Because "begins" is the longest word in the poem, it carries extra emphasis□which is appropriate for the plot of the poem. Dickinson manages to leave what happens to the word an utter mystery, but she lets us know that that word will have an exciting life as it "begins to live."

Here, the first line of the masterful "My Life ..." states a mystery, but states it with absolute clarity: "My life closed twice before its close." Again, with just one word carrying two syllables□ "before"□that word carries extra strength. And again, quite typically, Dickinson doesn't reveal what those two times were. Instead, she states that there is a possibility of even more mystery:

It yet remains to see If Immortality unveil A Third event to me

With Dickinson, it always "remains to see." That first line is composed of delicate, masterful sound without a syllable wasted. "Life" and "twice" form a sweet, internal rhyme, and of course,

"closed" and "close" lay out a rhythm which immediately sticks in the mind. The next three lines are shorter and sweeter. "See" and "me" are rhymed, but the poem moves swiftly to the second stanza□the seat of the largest mystery here.

So huge, so hopeless to conceive.

This mystery will be as heavy as immortality, and the alliteration of huge and hopeless hints at the heft of this unknown quantity. Of course, it is impossible for the reader to conceive the "hugeness" of the third mystery with no concept of the first two.

This type of gap is certainly frustrating. But Dickinson liked her poetry□and perhaps her life□ that way. At one point, she wrote to a friend: "The Riddle marks we can guess / We speedily despise," which often seems like her motto.

There are numerous possibilities for what the two "closes" mentioned here really are in Dickinson's biography, which is full of question marks. Dickinson never married, and it is possible that the two "closes" refer to failed love affairs. They may refer to unreturned love. Some biographers claim that Dickinson was in love with her best friend, Susan Gilbert, who eventually became Dickinson's brother's wife.

Reading Emily Dickinson's letters, it's easy to imagine that she would have enjoyed all of this speculation. In one letter, for example, Dickinson expressed her love of mystery and riddle to Susan Gilbert: "In a life that stopped guessing, you and I should not feel at home." Death, of course, was the ultimate mystery for Dickinson, and she refers to death and related terms like immortality repeatedly in her poem.

But another key element of Dickinson the person and the poet becomes crucial in the second stanza. Dickinson loved dictionaries and once revealed that for years, a dictionary was her only companion. Many of her poems, then, aim for definitions. (In a biographical aside,Amherst College was founded by Dickinson's grandfather and Noah Webster, of Webster's Dictionary.) She tries to explain terms, and here, she grasps at death and immortality through the means of definition:

Parting is all we know of heaven and all we need of hell.

This defines "parting," and does so in the most mysterious way. Interestingly, there are two main dictionary meanings for "parting." The first is a "leave-taking." But the second□"a place where things part or are parted"□makes sense for this line. Parting is a place, just as heaven is. Heaven is the destination of the dead□those separated, or parted from, the living. In that sense, a parting as a place where one parts from another is exactly the element of heaven which we can "know."

In their essence, of course, "heaven" and "hell," like immortality, are unknown quantities. A trip to a basic dictionary□the New Shorter Oxford□reveals six definitions for "heaven" and eight for "hell," along with dozens of individual examples. With that definition-like line, it seems that Dickinson may not only be defining her view of death, but also explaining her feelings about mystery. Mystery is part pleasure and part pain□one-half delight and one-half deprivation. The delight of the unknown is quite possibly all we

know of heaven, while the pang of secrecy is sheer hell□ or at least "what we know of it."

Thinking of the poem as a comment on mystery allows one to return to the first line and see that it is not as morose as it sounds: "My life closed twice before its close" might not mean a triple death. It's quite possible that the "close" was a delightful or heavenly moment. But one thing is nearly certain□Dickinson enjoyed planting the mystery in that first line, just as she enjoyed arranging the sounds of "closed" and "close" and the double "all"s preceding heaven and hell. What makes Dickinson memorable is not only her masterful command of sound and line, but her ability to present and sustain a mystery.

Source: Aviya Kushner, in an essay for *Poetry for Students,* Gale Group, 2000.

Adaptations

In 1993, Atschul Group Corp. released a video cassette entitled *Emily Dickinson.*

In 1994, Kino International released a video cassette entitled *The Belle ofAmherst.*

In 1977, Aids of Cape Cod released a film strip entitled *Emily Dickinson: I'm Nobody! Who Are You?,* for the "Americans Who Changed Things" series.

In 1996, Mystic Fire Audio released an audio cassette entitled *Emily Dickinson,* for the "Voices and Visions" series, volume two.

In 1999, Dove Audio released an audio compact disk entitled *Poems of Emily Dickinson.*

In 1996, EMILY released an audio cassette entitled *Emily Dickinson: Selected Poems.*

In 1960, Caedmon released an audio record album entitled *Poems and Letters of Emily Dickinson.*

In 1993, Marion Woodman recorded an audio casssette entitled *Emily Dickinson and the Demon Lover.* The cassette was released by Sounds True Recording.

In 1998, Monterey Home Video released a video cassette entitled *The World of Emily Dickinson.* The video cassette belongs to The Master Poets Collection, volume 1.

Topics for Further Study

Write a letter from the point of view of one of the people involved in the two awful partings mentioned here. Imagine that in the circumstances you felt it was right to part, but that you also want to comfort the speaker of "My Life Closed Twice before Its Close."

Some people say that bad news comes in groups of three, like the three events that this poem talks about. Do you agree? Why or why not? Use examples to support whichever side of the argument you are defending.

What exactly does the speaker mean by "Immortality"? Why do you think this word is used, rather than "God"?

Examine an example of an artistic piece that seemed to close, to reach its end, but then continued on□a movie or a song, perhaps. Analyze what you think the artist was trying to say by this, and how you think it relates to Dickinson's point in this poem.

Compare and Contrast

1896: Entrepreneur Henry Morrison Flagler, one of the founders of Standard Oil, dredged the south Florida swamp to extend his railway, reaching the newly-incorporated town of Miami. The year before the unincorporated territory consisted of only three houses. Flagler owned a cluster of Florida resorts, with major hotels in Daytona and Palm Beach.

1990s: Miami is the largest metropolitan area in Florida. Over 40 million tourists visit the state each year, mostly to visit the cluster of theme parks around Orlando.

1896: The first public showing of a motion picture occurred in New York, at Koster and Bial's Music Hall.

1956: The first successful videotape recorder was demonstrated at Ampex Corp. in Redwood City, California.

1990s: Advanced home theater technology threatens to make public move viewing obsolete.

1896: The discovery of gold in theKlondike Territory, near the Alaskan border, led to a gold rush that brought miners from around the world. By the end of the next year, over $22 million had been mined, and many of Alaska's major cities had been settled.

1973: When the OPEC oil embargo cut off the United States' main source of inexpensive oil,

Congress authorized the nine billion dollar Alaska Pipeline to pump crude oil from Alaska's Arctic coastal plain to the accessible port ofValdez.

1990s: Oil is the main economic force in Alaska.

1896: The first continuing comic strip, "The Yellow Kid," began as a one-panel feature in Joseph Pulitzer's newspaper *New York World.*

1990s: Readers expect at least a page of comics in any reputable metropolitan newspaper.

1896: In the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* the U.S. Supreme Court upheld segregation of blacks and whites. The ruling called for "separate but equal" access to accommodations such as transportation and education, but common practice quickly established the practice of offering blacks inferior services.

1954: In the case of *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas,* the Supreme Court ruled that separate accommodations would never be equal, and overturned the decision of *Plessy.* The Chief Justice of the Court, Warren Berger, ordered that schools across the country be integrated "with all deliberate speed."

1990s: Debates continue about what school systems should do to narrow the discernable gap in test scores between blacks and whites.

What Do I Read Next?

For thirty years Emily Dickinson corresponded with her sister-in-law and next-door-neighbor Susan Huntington Dickinson. The resulting mix of letters, notes, and poems was finally published in 1998 as *Open Me Carefully,* edited by Ellen Louise Hart and Martha Nell Smith, who wrote the introduction.

John Donne was a metaphysical poet who died nearly two hundred years before Dickinson was born. His themes and reflections on the nature of God resemble Dickinson's, as well as his irregular poetry patterns. One of several good collections of his works is the Modern Library 1994 publication of *The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne.*

Because the author herself never arranged for the publication of her works, the process of gathering her poems for publication has been slow. The current definitive text is *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson,* published by Little, Brown and Company, edited by Thomas H. Johnson. The paperback edition was published in 1976.

Students interested in New England Transcendentalism, which is the intellectual background that Dickinson came from, will be interested in the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who is considered to be the main figure of this philosophical movement. His writings have been collected in one definitive volume, *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures,* published by the Library of America in 1983.

Because Dickinson was a recluse in her lifetime, the question often arises regarding who she thought would read her poems. The University ofMichigan Press has collected essays on this subject from a wide variety of critics and historians in *Dickinson and Audience,* edited by Martin Orzek and Robert Weisbuch, first published in 1996.

Further Study

Capps, Jack L., *Emily Dickinson's Reading: 1836-1886,* Cambridge, MA:Harvard University Press, 1966.

This meticulously researched book examines Dickinson's career from the point of view of what she read and what the author concludes she would have read, ranging from the King James Version of the Bible to the important topics in contemporary newspapers.

Diehl, Joanne Feit, *Dickinson and the Romantic Imagination,* Princeton, NJ:Princeton University Press, 1981.

A solid interpretation of Dickinson's thought in terms of Romanticism.

Ford, Thomas W., *Heaven Beguiles the Tired: Death in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson,* University, AL: University ofAlabama Press, 1966.

Surprisingly, this poem is not included in Ford's study about the ways in which Dickinson's poems display her feelings about death; it nonetheless provides a good background understanding of how she approached the subject in general.

Johnson, Greg, *Emily Dickinson: Perception and the Poet's Quest,* University, AL: University ofAlabama Press, 1985. This is a scholarly work that examines the concept of perception, of the line between the knowable and the unknowable, as the key to understanding this poet's work.

Gilbert, Sandra M., "The Wayward Nun Beneath the Hill: Emily Dickinson and the Mysteries of Womanhood," in *Feminist Critics Read Emily Dickinson,* edited by Suzanne Juhasz, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983. Dickinson has been a favorite for feminist writers, and this essay, along with the other essays in this text, makes it easier to understand the myth around her and the ways that the myth obscures our understanding her as a living breathing woman.

Juhasz, Suzanne, *The Undiscovered Continent: Emily Dickinson and the Space of the Mind,* Bloomington, IN:Indiana University Press, 1983.

Juhasz offers a feminist interpretation of Dickinson, proposing that the poet's way of dealing with the problem of being an artistic woman in the nineteenth century was to create a new terrain, a free space, in her mind.

Lundin, Roger, *Emily Dickinson and the Art of Belief,* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998. Most biographical works about Dickinson mention her religious beliefs, but Lundin's is one of the few book-length works to concentrate on that aspect of her life exclusively.

Small, Judy Jo, *Positive as Sound: Emily Dickinson's Rhyme,* Athens, GA: The University ofGeorgia Press, 1990. A book-length analysis of the poet's rhyme patterns

might seem to some to be too narrowly focused, but Small manages to weave her material into a fascinating story that helps make sense of Dickinson's life and ideas.

Wolosky, Shira, "A Syntax of Contention," in *Emily Dickinson,* edited by Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsa House, 1985, pp. 161-85.

This essay does not specifically examine the poem called "My Life Closed Twice," but it does provide a good clear analysis of the poet's use of language and the way she gave life to abstract ideas.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Poetry for Students (PfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, PfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of PfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of PfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in PfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by PfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

PfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Poetry for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Poetry for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Poetry for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from PfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from PfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Poetry for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Poetry for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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